

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

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TAGS: PFOR EG US

SUBJ: CAIRO OPERA HOUSE

REF: CAIRO 6492 AND 5682

1. IN THE COURSE OF A TALK LAST WEEK WITH YOUSSEF EL-SIBAL, MINISTER OF CULTURE, HE RAISED THE SUBJECT OF US ASSISTANCE FOR THE CAIRO OPERA HOUSE. AFTER NOTING THE MINISTRY'S PREVIOUS PERTINENT DISCUSSIONS WITH PROF BORNEMANN OF WEST GERMANY (CAIRO A-86), HE CLAIMED PRESIDENT SADAT PREFERS TO HAVE THE JOB DONE BY AN AMERICAN FIRM. REFERRING TO THE JOINT NIXON-SADAT COMMUNIQUE OF JUNE 14, 1974, HE NOTED USG HAD OFFERED TO HELP IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE OPERA HOUSE. WHAT PRECISELY DID IT HAVE IN MIND?

2. I POINTED OUT THAT JOINT COMMUNIQUE HAD INDICATED USG HAD INDICATED IT WOULD "CONSIDER HOW IT MIGHT ASSIST THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF CAIRO'S OPERA HOUSE". IN AN EFFORT TO IMPLEMENT THIS, WE HAVE BEEN SEEKING TO ASSEMBLE MATERIAL ON MODERN PERFORMING ART CENTERS. IT SEEMED TO US THAT GOE MIGHT BE WELL ADVISED TO THINK IN TERMS OF A LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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VERSATILE PERFORMING ARTS CENTER RATHER THAN A MORE

LIMITED OPERA HOUSE. EL-SIBAI AGREED AND SAID THIS WAS ALSO HIS THINKING. I ALSO NOTED THAT WE WERE LOOKING FOR WAYS AND MEANS OF ASSISTING GOE ON THE DESIGN OF SUCH A STRUCTURE. SO FAR AS COSTS OF CONSTRUCTION ARE CONCERNED, I SUGGESTED THE PROJECT SHOULD TAKE ITS PLACE IN THE SPECTRUM OF GOE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND BE ASSIGNED A PRIORITY VIS-A-VIS OTHER NEEDED PROJECTS.

3. EL-SIBAI APPEARED TO EXPECT SOME SUCH ANSWER. HE INDICATED GOE WILL WELCOME AMERICAN ASSISTANCE IN PLANNING AND DESIGN WORK AND THAT HE HOPED, ULTIMATELY, SOME FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE MIGHT ALSO BE PROVIDED FOR RECONSTRUCTION. WHILE HE LAMENTED THE FACT THAT THE CAIRO OPERA HOUSE COMPLEX HAS LOW PRIORITY IN TERMS OF EGYPT'S DEVELOPMENT NEEDS, HE NEVERTHELESS RECOGNIZED THE REASONS FOR THIS. WE AGREED TO KEEP IN TOUCH ON THE SUBJECT.

4. AS A SEPARATE MATTER, AMERICAN FIRM OF PORTER AND RIPA ASSOCIATES OF MORRISTOWN, NEW JERSEY, HAS SUBMITTED A PROPOSAL TO THE GOE TO DO AN ENGINEERING AND ARCHITECTURAL STUDY FOR A CAIRO OPERA HOUSE RECONSTRUCTION. PROPOSAL WAS SENT DIRECTLY TO PRESIDENT SADAT, WHICH MAY BE AN ADDITIONAL REASON FOR THE PRESIDENT'S REPORTED INTEREST IN HAVING AN AMERICAN FIRM DO THE JOB. AS FAR AS WE ARE AWARE, THIS PROPOSAL IS STILL UNDER STUDY.

4. COMMENT: IN ORDER TO AVOID ANY MISUNDERSTANDING ON THE PART OF THE MINISTER, I DEEMED IT TIMELY TO MAKE CLEAR NO SEPARATE FUNDING IS LIKELY TO BE AVAILABLE FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CAIRO OPERA HOUSE AND THAT GOE MUST ITSELF ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR GIVING IT A PRIORITY IN ITS TOTAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN.
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